

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1693

INFO USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TUNIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TRIPOLI 1223

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: P I N T L Y

SUBJECT: INTERNAL IMPLICATIONS OF LIBYAN PARTY CONGRESS

REF: TRIPOLI 1182 AND SUBSEQUENT

SUMMARY: LIBYAN PARTY CONGRESS HAS GIVEN US A VALUABLE LOOK AT REGIME AND ITS DOMESTIC CRITICS. FACE TO FACE WITH PARTY RANK AND FILE, WHO ARE CLEARLY UNHAPPY OVER ADMINISTRATIVE CHAOS AND WORRIED THAT REGIME IS SACRIFICING LIBYAN DEVELOPMENT TO FOREIGN ADVENTURES, QADHAFI HAS LISTENED TO GRIEVANCES AND DONE SOME LONG OVERDUE FENCE-MENDING. HE HAS FACED CRITICISM FROM ISLAMIC CONSERVATIVES, AND SPOKEN OF AN "EXTREMELY SERIOUS" COMMUNIST PLOT, WITH LINKS TO MOSCOW. AIRING OF GRIEVANCES HAS PROBABLY TAKEN SOME INTERNAL PRESSURE OFF REGIME FOR THE MOMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. MARATHON ARAB SOCIALIST UNION CONGRESS, PRESIDED OVER THROUGHOUT BY QADHAFI, HAS NOW ENDED. ITS SIGNIFICANCE LIES NOT SO MUCH IN ITS FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS (REPORTED BY FBIS), WHICH WERE DICTATED BY QADHAFI, AS IN WHAT IT HAS

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REVEALED OF DOMESTIC GRUMBLING AND REGIME'S REACTION TO IT.

AFTER SOME EXTREMELY BITTER EXCHANGES BETWEEN QADHAFI AND DELEGATES ON SECOND DAY (TRIPOLI 1196), ATMOSPHERE LIGHTENED, AND THERE WAS EASING OF TENSION. QADHAFI CONTINUED TO BE PEREMPTORY (HE HAD A BUTTON UNDER HIS TABLE WHICH HE COULD PRESS TO SHUT DOWN MICROPHONES OF OBSTREPEROUS DELEGATES.), BUT HE KEPT CONTROL OF PROCEEDINGS AND HIS TEMPER. DEBATE CONTINUED TO BE HEATED AND REMARKABLY FREE.

2. BACKGROUND: AS WE HAVE BEEN REPORTING (CF. TRIPOLI A-29), FOR SOME MONTHS THERE HAVE BEEN GROWING SIGNS OF POPULAR DISCONTENT OVER CHAOS LEFT IN WAKE OF 1973 POPULAR REVOLUTION. EVEN BY LAX LIBYAN STANDARDS, GOVT SEEMED TO BE DRIFTING AIMLESSLY UNDER JALLUD, WHILE QADHAFI DID A VIRTUAL DISAPPEARING ACT LASTING OVER FOUR MONTHS. IT WAS THUS HIGH TIME FOR QADHAFI TO TURN HIS ATTACK IN FORM OF "FATE OF ARAB NATION" TO DOMESTIC COMPLAINTS, OR AT LEAST TO SHOW SOME SIGN OF DOING SO.

3. PROBLEMS: CONFERENCE DELEGATES HAD LONG LIST OF COMPLAINTS THEY HAD BEEN SAVING, RANGING FROM NEGLECT OF ASU ITSELF IN FAVOR OF POPULAR COMMITTEES (THOUGH MANY SEEMED TO BE MEMBERS OF BOTH) TO SUSPICIOUS EGYPTIANS, WHO OUGHT TO BE WATCHED MORE CLOSELY BY POLICE. THEIR PROBLEMS WERE OFTEN DOWN TO EARTH: HOUSING, AGRICULTURE, INADEQUATE ELECTRICITY AND WATER, PROSPECT OF BEING RELOCATED TO POTENTIALLY MORE FERTILE AREAS, AND THE LIKE. ISLAMIC CONSERVATIVES AND MERCHANTS CONTINUED TO COMPLAIN ABOUT TAXES AND "FORBIDDEN" INTEREST ON GOVT LOANS. THEY DID GET A PROMISE THAT THE GRADUATED INCOME TAX WOULD BE REVIEWED, THOUGH QADHAFI SAID IT COULD NOT BE ABANDONED. TO WHAT SEEMED GENERAL APPROVAL, ONE RELIGIOUS "LEADER" PROPOSED TO CONFERENCE THAT PEOPLE CAUGHT DRINKING SPIRITS BE SHIPPED. QADHAFI OPPOSED THIS HOWEVER, CITING SCRIPTURE, AND AS USUAL CARRIED THE DAY. CONSERVATIVES ALSO OBJECTED TO GENERAL MILITARY TRAINING FOR WOMEN STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITY, RECENTLY INSTITUTED BY RCC. QADHAFI AT FIRST THREATENED TO BRING THREE HUNDRED GIRLS WHO HAD FAILED TO SHOW UP FOR TRAINING TO TRIAL (BASIS FOR AL-AHRAM REPORT CITED IN CAIRO 8911), BUT SEEMED TO LEAN MORE TOWARD FORGIVING THEM, OR AT WORST EXCLUDING THEM FROM UNIVERSITY FOR A YEAR.

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4. ALTHOUGH MUCH LIP SERVICE WAS PAID DURING CONFERENCE TO DEMOCRACY IT WAS CLEAR FROM BEGINNING THAT QADHAFI WOULD ALWAYS HAVE LAST WORD. HIS PROPOSAL FOR REORGANIZATION OF ASU WAS "ADOPTED", FOR EXAMPLE, OVER CLEAR DISSENT OF MAJORITY OF DELEGATES, BY SIMPLE EXPEDIENT OF NOT PUTTING IT TO VOTE. QADHAFI'S "SUGGESTION" THAT PROVINCES AND

DIRECTORATES, TWO INTERMEDIATE LEVELS OF ADMINISTRATION, BE ABOLISHED, ALSO CARRIED. DELEGATES SEEMED TO THINK IT WAS GOOD IDEA IN PRINCIPLE (THEORY IS THAT BUREAUCRATIC BARRIERS BETWEEN MINISTERS AND PEOPLE WILL BE REMOVED.), BUT WERE UNSURE HOW IT WOULD WORK IN PRACTICE. WHEN MINISTER OF LABOR AL-OBEIDI EXPRESSED CAREFULLY HEDGED RESERVATION, QADHAFI REMINDED HIM HE COULD ALWAYS RESIGN.

5. PRIORITY TO ARMY: IN HIS PERORATION TO CONFERENCE, QADHAFI SPOKE DIRECTLY TO HEART OF MATTER: HAD REGIME, IN ITS PREOCCUPATION WITH FOREIGN ADVENTURES AND ARAB UNITY, NEGLECTED INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT? IT WAS TRUE, QADHAFI ADMITTED, THAT HINGING DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS ON SUCCESS OF UNITY WITH EGYPT HAD CAUSED SOME DELAYS. BUT BASICALLY, HE ASSURED CONFERENCE, LIBYAN DEVELOPMENT HAD NOT SUFFERED FROM HIS FOREIGN POLICY. PROBLEMS LIKE INADEQUATE ELECTRICITY, TELEPHONE SERVICE, HOUSING, WOULD ALL BE SOLVED IN TIME. IN ANY CASE, THERE WAS NO QUESTION OF CHANGING HIS LINE ON UNITY AND SUPPORT FOR LIBERATION MOVEMENTS AND ISLAMIC CAUSES. HE REMINDED HIS AUDIENCE THAT SIXTY YEARS AGO, AS RESULT OF COVENANTS ARRIVED AT IN EUROPE, LIBYA HAD BEEN INVADED BY ITALIANS, "AND WE WILL SUFFER FROM THIS ALL OUR LIVES". SAME THING COULD HAPPEN AGAIN: "GREAT POWERS HAVE BEGUN TO SAY THAT IT IS THEIR RIGHT TO INVADE US, SINCE OIL IS A VITAL NECESSITY FOR THEM". WORLD WAS INCREASINGLY INTERCONNECTED.... "PEOPLE WHO BUY WHEAT FROM AMERICA PLACE THEIR LIVES IN HANDS OF AMERICA". A STRONG ARMY WAS IMPERATIVE. COMMENT: QADHAFI PROBABLY HAD JACK ANDERSON'S RECENT COLUMN REPORTING LOOSE TALK ABOUT U.S. MILITARY INTERVENTION IN LIBYA IN MIND HERE.

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6. A COMMUNIST PLOT: WINDING UP HIS CLOSING SPEECH, QADHAFI DISCUSSED REGIME'S POLITICAL OPPONENTS, WHO HAD INCLUDED BAATHIS, MUSLIM BROTHERS, AND MEMBERS OF ISLAMIC LIBERATION PARTY. THEY WERE IN JAIL. "ANYONE WHO JOINS A PARTY IS A TRAITOR". RECENTLY, AN EXTREMELY SERIOUS PLOT AGAINST REGIME HAD BEEN UNCOVERED. PLOTTERS HAD SET UP SECRET CELLS 16 AND 17, AND DOCUMENTS HAD BEEN FOUND CALLING FOR DICTATORSHIP OF SINGLE CLASS. PLOTTERS HAD UNFORTUNATELY BEEN ARRESTED IN UNSOUND, LAWLESS MANNER, AND THINGS HAPPENED WHICH SHOULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED. AS RESULT, EVEN THOUGH THEIR GUILT WAS OBVIOUS, ORDINARY COURT MIGHT HAVE TO LET THEM GO. THIS WAS UNACCEPTABLE, AND THEY WOULD BE PUT AWAY FOR THIRTY, FIFTY YEARS, "UNTIL THEY ARE CURED". THEY WERE PEOPLE TO WHOM RCC HAD ENTRUSTED RESPONSIBILITY, AND THEY HAD BEEN PLOTTING FROM UNDERNEATH. "THEIR CONTACTS WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES ARE CLEAR. BEING A COMMUNIST MEANS YOUR CAPITOL IS MOSCOW, AND YOUR COUNTRY IS RUSSIA". IN DISCUSSING "PLOT", QADHAFI SEEMED DEFENSIVE AND PARTICULARLY ANXIOUS TO REFUTE CHARGES THAT HE WAS USING REPRESSION, AS HE HAS SO OFTEN ACCUSED OTHER ARAB LEADERS OF DOING.
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7. LETTING OFF STEAM: THERE IS LITTLE QUESTION THAT AIRING OF GRIEVANCES AT CONFERENCE HAS TAKEN SOME INTERNAL PRESSURE OFF REGIME, AT LEAST FROM ITS RANK AND FILE SUPPORTERS. ABOLISHING TWO LEVELS OF ADMINISTRATION WILL OBVIOUSLY DO LITTLE TO CURE CHAOS LEFT BY POPULAR REVOLUTION, BUT MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANY CONCRETE MEASURES DECIDED ON, IS FACT THAT QADHAFI, JALLUD, AND OTHER RCC MEMBERS SAT FOR NINE THREE HOUR SESSIONS AND LISTENED, EXPLAINED, AND DEFENDED THEIR POLICIES IN PUBLIC. THROUGHOUT CONFERENCE QADHAFI WAS DIDACTIC AND DICTATORIAL, BUT HE WAS ALWAYS IN DIRECT CONTACT WITH DELEGATES. HE CHALLENGED THEM, AND ON OCCASION EVEN INSULTED THEM, BUT HE ALWAYS GAVE IMPRESSION OF LEVELLING WITH THEM.
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